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Homophobia: A Modern Sickness

Dmitri Mehlhorn Feb 11, 2016 · 5 min read

Gilgamesh and Enkidu (Neil Dalrymple)

Gilgamesh, an ancient warrior-king, was immortalized in humanity's first great work of literature, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. As described in the Encyclopedia of Ancient History, "Gilgamesh is widely accepted as the historical 5th king of Uruk whose influence was so profound that myths of his divine status grew up around his deeds."

Gilgamesh also seems to have been homosexual.

The great love of Gilgamesh's life was Enkidu, a wild man. Gilgamesh's mother, a goddess, told him about Enkidu that: "a strong partner shall come to you . . . you shall love him as a wife." The prostitute Shamhat, after seducing and civilizing Enkidu, told him that he and Gilgamesh "will love one another."

Gilamesh and Enkidu were not alone. Ancient Greece and Rome had widespread acceptance of same-sex relationships, including stories of heroes like Hercules and Achilles, as well as poetry from Sappho and philosophy from Plato. Documents from ancient civilizations throughout Asia and the Middle East demonstrate widespread homosexuality. Homosexuality was widely accepted for centuries in China. In Africa, the ancient tomb of royal courtiers Khnumhotep and Niankhkhnum signified one of the oldest recorded same-sex relationships from the time of ancient Egypt's pharoahs. John Boswell has written about how in premodern Europe, both the Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches sanctioned same-sex marriages in ceremonies strikingly similar to modern religious heterosexual ceremonies.

In other words, according to the best archaeology and literature studies we have available, homosexuals have been around for as long as we've had humanity.

. . .

Longer, actually. If we turn from soft sciences to harder sciences such as zoology and biology, we find that homosexuality existed long before human beings evolved. According to research published in 2009 article in the journal *Trends in Ecology & Evolution*, same-sex behavior is a nearly universal phenomenon in the animal kingdom, found in species from worms and frogs to mammals and birds.

A female-female pair of Laysan Albatross

This kind of diversity means that homosexuality appeared in life long before humanity evolved.

> Homosexuality has been part of nature for many millions of years.

In his book The Social Conquest of Earth, legendary Harvard biologist E.O. Wilson explains that homosexuality is far too prevalent in nature to be an accident or mutation — it must, on the contrary, serve an evolutionary purpose. He has theorized that for higher social animals such as humans, homosexuality serves a vital function of promoting positive group dynamics.

The American bison exhibits homosexual behaviors (no, not in this picture)

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atural history seems to have been lost on modern leaders. Hostility to homosexuality

N is widespread among men throughout the Muslim world, east Asia, and the former Soviet Union. Former Iranian leader Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, for instance, claimed that Iran had no homosexuals. The current President of Uganda, Yoweri Museveni, has called homosexuality "unnatural" and "disgusting" as he has explained why he signed a law making certain homosexual acts punishable by life in prison. The atheistic Soviet Union criminalized homosexuality, and current Russian leader Vladimir Putin has allied himself with the Russian Orthodox Church to criticize homosexuality as deviant and repugnant.

This hostility to homosexuals is not limited to regressive areas of the world.

For example, prior to Pope Francis, the Catholic Church was formally hostile to gay rights. Recently, a Catholic priest in Italy, Father Gino Flaim, called homosexuality "a sickness" that was much less comprehensible to him than pedophilia. Current top-tier Republican presidential candidate Ted Cruz has made an attack on marriage equality a central premise of his campaign, arguing that homosexuality violates the Bible. While it is true that the Bible does have language disfavoring homosexuality, the Bible also bans a very long list of other behaviors (such as shaving and American football) which get less attention.

Hosility to homosexuals also extends beyond the boundaries of religion.

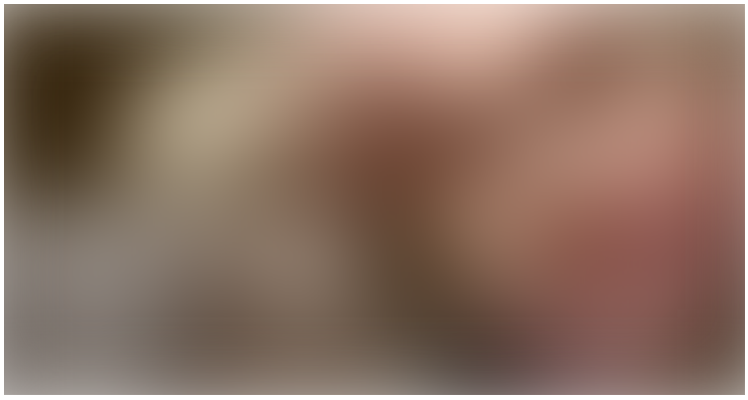
Current Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts, in a dissent to the Court's decision in the case of Obergefell v. Hodges, wrote that the legalization of same-sex marriage was an affront to "respect for the teachings of history," and "to blind yourself to history is both prideful and unwise." Roberts' reading of history extends "millennia, for the Kalahari Bushmen and the Han Chinese, the Carthaginians and the Aztecs." Embarrassingly, none of the four civilizations Roberts mentions had an exclusive one-man-one-woman definition of marriage. At least Roberts' opinion was in dissent; the now-invalid 1986 decision Bowers v. Hardwick upheld anti-homosexual "sodomy" laws using equally false historical arguments.

> How could this objectively false idea — that homosexuality is unnatural — become so

widespread ? How could political, religious, and legal scholars develop such a wildly inaccurate view of nature and humanity?

Colonel Frank Fitts comes out

We have some evidence from the psychological study of humans today. Research by scholars from the Stanford University School of Medicine showed that homophobia arises in males as a defense mechanism due to unresolved psychosexual anxieties. One way to understand this research is that when boys feel sexually insecure or inadequate, they sometimes become homophobic as a coping mechanism. Like the character Colonel Frank Fitts in the movie American Beauty, they violently proclaim their hostility to homosexuality because they need reassurance that they are real men.



He claimed it was a wide stance

We have seen precisely this phenomenon play out repeatedly in the United States anti-gay movement. Examples include Family Research Council founder George Rekers, evangelical leader Ted Haggard, former national Young Republican president Glenn Murphy Jr., and Republican Senator Larry Craig, all of whom were vociferously homophobic in their public statements until they were found to have engaged in homosexual acts that were otherwise illegal (because they involved solicitation or coercion).

It doesn't require much imagination to imagine how this might play out across history. As religious or political leaders turn their personal coping mechanism into a broader crusade, a society can turn hostile to homosexuality. Thus, a disease of individuals becomes a disease of society. Those who care about facts and evidence, however, should acknowledge that this is a modern sickness.

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